

THOMPSON, CHENEY, MURPHY, & RASKIN OPENING STATEMENTS AT SELECT COMMITTEE HEARING

Jul 12, 2022

-- As Delivered --

Chairman Thompson: “Good afternoon.

“When I think about the most basic way to explain the importance of elections in the United States, there’s a phrase that always comes to mind. It may sound straightforward, but it’s meaningful: We settle our differences at the ballot box.

“Sometimes my choice prevails. Sometimes yours does. But it’s that simple. We cast our votes. We count the votes. If something seems off with the results, we can challenge them in court. And then we accept the results.

“When you’re on the losing side, that doesn’t mean you have to be happy about it.

“And in the United States, there’s plenty you can do and say so.

“You can protest. You can organize. You can get ready for the next election to try to make sure your side has a better chance the next time the people settle their differences at the ballot box.

“But you can’t turn violent. You can’t try to achieve your desired outcome through force or harassment or intimidation.

“Any real leader who sees their supporters going down that path—approaching that line—has a responsibility to say, “Stop. We gave it our best. We came up short. We’ll try again next time. Because we settle our differences at the ballot box.”

“On December 14th, 2020, the Presidential election was officially over. The Electoral College had cast its votes. Joe Biden was the President-elect of the United States.

“By that point, many of Donald Trump’s supporters were already convinced that the election had been stolen, because that’s what Donald Trump had been telling them.

“So what Donald Trump was required to do in that moment—what would have been required of any American leader—was to say, “We did our best and we came up short.”

“He went the opposite way. He seized on the anger he had already stoked among his most loyal supporters. And as they approached the line, he didn’t wave them off. He urged them on.

“Today the committee will explain how as part of his last-ditch effort to overturn the election and block the transfer of power, Donald Trump summoned a mob to Washington, DC, and ultimately spurred that mob to wage a violent attack on our democracy.

“Our colleagues Mrs. Murphy of Florida and Mr. Raskin of Maryland will lay out this story.

“First, I’m pleased to recognize our distinguished Vice Chair, Ms. Cheney of Wyoming, for any opening comments she’d care to offer.”

Vice Chair Cheney: “Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

“The Committee did not conduct a hearing last week, but we did conduct an on-the-record interview of President Trump’s former White House Counsel, Pat Cipillone.

“If you have watched these hearings, you have heard us call for Mr. Cipillone to come forward to testify. He did. And Mr. Cipillone’s testimony met our expectations.

“We will save for our next hearing President Trump’s behavior during the violence of January 6th.

“Today’s hearing will take us take us from December 14th, 2020, when the Electoral College met and certified the results of the 2020 Presidential election, up through the morning of January 6th.

“You will see certain segments of Pat Cipillone’s testimony today. We will also see today how President Trump summoned a mob to Washington and how the President’s stolen election lies provoked that mob to attack the Capitol.

“And we will hear from a man who was induced by President Trump’s lies to come to Washington and join the mob, and how that decision has changed his life.

“Today’s hearing is our seventh. We have covered significant ground over the past several weeks. And we have also seen a change in how witnesses and lawyers in the Trump orbit approach this Committee.

“Initially, their strategy in some cases appeared to be to ‘deny and delay.’

“Today, there appears to be a general recognition that the Committee has established key facts, including that virtually everyone close to President Trump—his Justice Department officials, his White House advisors, his White House Counsel, his campaign—all told him the 2020 election was not stolen.

“This appears to have changed the strategy for defending Donald Trump. Now, the argument seems to be that President Trump was manipulated by others outside the Administration.

“That he was persuaded to ignore his closest advisors, and that he was incapable of telling right from wrong.

“This new strategy is to try to blame only John Eastman, or Sidney Powell, or Congressmen Scott Perry, or others, and not President Trump. In this version the President was quote ‘poorly served’ by them.

“The strategy is to blame people his advisors called ‘the crazies’ for what Donald Trump did.

“This of course is nonsense. President Trump is a 76-year-old man, he is not an impressionable child.

“Just like everyone else in our country, he is responsible for his own actions, and his own choices.

“As our investigation has shown, Donald Trump had access to more detailed and specific information showing that the election was not actually stolen than almost any other American.

“And he was told this over and over again. No rational or sane man in his position could disregard that information and reach the opposite conclusion.

“And Donald Trump cannot escape responsibility by being willfully blind.

“Nor can any argument of any kind excuse President Trump’s behavior during the violent attack on January 6th.

“As you watch our hearing today, I would urge you to keep your eye on two specific points.

“First, you will see evidence today that Trump’s legal team, led by Rudy Giuliani, knew that they lacked actual evidence of widespread fraud sufficient to prove that the election was actually stolen.

“They knew it. But they went ahead with January 6th anyway.

“And second, consider how millions of Americans were persuaded to believe what Donald Trump’s closest advisors in his Administration did not.

“These Americans did not have access to the truth, like Donald Trump did. They put their faith, and their trust, in Donald Trump. They wanted to believe in him; they wanted to fight for their country.

“And he deceived them.

“For millions of Americans, that may be painful to accept. But it is true.

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.”

Rep. Murphy: “Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

“We know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that then-President Donald Trump lost in a free and fair election.

“And yet, President Trump insisted that his loss was due to fraud in the election process, rather than to the democratic will of the voters.

“The President continued to make this claim despite being told, again and again, by the courts, by the Justice Department, by his campaign officials, and by some of his closest advisors, that the evidence did not support this assertion.

“This was the Big Lie—and millions of Americans were deceived by it.

“Too many of our fellow citizens still believe it to this day. It’s corrosive to our country and damaging to our democracy.

“As our Committee has shown in prior hearings, following the election, President Trump relentlessly pursued multiple, interlocking lines of effort, all with a single goal: to remain in power despite having lost.

“The lines of effort were aimed at his loyal Vice President, Mike Pence; at state election and elected officials; and at the U.S. Department of Justice.

“The President pressured the Vice President to obstruct the process to certify the election result.

“He demanded that state officials “find” him enough votes to overturn the election outcome in that state.

“And he pressed the Department of Justice to find widespread evidence of fraud.

“When Justice officials told the President that such evidence did not exist, the President urged them to simply declare that the election was corrupt.

“On December 14th, the Electoral College met to officially confirm that Joe Biden would be the next President.

“The evidence shows that, once this occurred, President Trump—and those who were willing to aid and abet him—turned their attention to the Joint Session of Congress scheduled for January 6th, at which the Vice President would preside.

“In their warped view, this ceremonial event was the next, and perhaps the last, inflection point that could be used to reverse the outcome of the election before Mr. Biden’s inauguration.

“As President Trump put it, the Vice President and enough Members of Congress simply needed to summon the ‘courage’ to act. To help them find that courage, the President called for backup.

“Early in the morning of December 19th, the President sent out a tweet, urging his followers to travel to Washington, DC for January 6th. ‘Be there, will be wild!’ the President wrote.

“As my colleague Mr. Raskin will describe in detail, this tweet served as a call to action, and in some cases as a call to arms, for many of President Trump’s most loyal supporters.

“It’s clear the President intended the assembled crowd on the January 6th to serve his goal.

“And as you have already seen, and as you will see again today, some of those who were coming had specific plans.

“The President’s goal was to stay in power for a second term despite losing the election. The Assembled crowd was one of the tools to achieve that goal.

“In today’s hearing, we will focus on events that took place in the final weeks leading up to January 6th, starting in mid-December.

“We will add color and context to evidence you’ve already heard about, and will also provide additional new evidence.

“For example, you’ll hear about meetings in which the President entertained extreme measures designed to help him stay in power, like the seizure of voting machines.

“We will show some of the coordination that occurred between the White House and Members of Congress as it relates to January 6th.

“And some of these Members of Congress would later seek pardons.

“We will also examine some of the planning for the January 6th protest, placing special emphasis on one rally-planner’s concerns about the potential violence.

And we will describe some of the President’s key actions on the evening of January 5th and the morning of January 6th, including how the President edited and ad-libbed his speech that morning at the Ellipse, directed the crowd to march to the Capitol, and spoke off-script in a way that further inflamed an already angry crowd.

“I yield to the gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Raskin.”

Rep. Raskin: “Thank you, Mrs. Murphy.

“Four days after the Electors met across the country and made Joe Biden the President-Elect of the United States, Donald Trump was still trying to find a way to hang on to the presidency.

“On Friday, December 18th, his team of outside advisors paid him a surprise visit in the White House that would quickly become the stuff of legend.

“The meeting has been called, ‘unhinged,’ ‘not normal,’ and the ‘craziest meeting of the Trump presidency.’

“The outside lawyers, who had been involved in dozens of failed lawsuits, had lots of theories supporting the Big Lie, but no evidence to support it.

“As we will see, however, they brought to the White House a draft Executive Order that they had prepared for President Trump to further his ends.

“Specifically, they proposed the immediate mass seizure of state election machines by the United States military.

“The meeting ended after midnight with apparent rejection of that idea.

“In the wee hours of December 19th, dissatisfied with his options, Donald Trump decided to call for a large and “wild” crowd on Wednesday, January 6th, the day when Congress would meet to certify the Electoral votes.

“Never before in American history had a president called for a crowd to come contest the counting of Electoral Votes by Congress, or engaged in any effort designed to influence, delay, or obstruct the Joint Session of Congress in doing its work required by our Constitution and the Electoral Count Act.

“As we’ll see, Donald Trump’s 1:42 a.m. Tweet electrified and galvanized his supporters and, especially the dangerous extremists in the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys, and other racist and white nationalist groups spoiling for a fight against the government.

“Three rings of interwoven attack were now operating towards January 6th.

“On the inside ring, Trump continued trying to work to overturn the election by getting Mike Pence to abandon his Oath of Office his Vice President, and assert the unilateral power to reject electoral votes.

“This would have been a fundamental and unprecedented breach of the Constitution that would promise Trump multiple ways of staying in office.

“Meanwhile, in the middle ring, members of domestic violent extremist groups created an alliance, both online and in person, to coordinate a massive effort to storm, invade and occupy the Capitol.

“By placing a target on the Joint Session of Congress Trump had mobilized these groups around a common goal, emboldening them, strengthening their working relationships, and helping build their numbers.

“Finally, in the outer ring, on January 6th there assembled a large and angry crowd, the political force that Trump considered both the touchstone and the measure of his political power.

“Here were thousands of enraged Trump followers, thoroughly convinced by the Big Lie, who traveled from across the country to join Trump’s, ‘wild’ rally to ‘Stop the Steal.’

“With the proper incitement by political leaders, and the proper instigation from the extremists, many members of this crowd could be led to storm the Capitol, confront the Vice President, and Congress, and try to overturn the 2020 election result.

“All of these efforts would converge and explode on January 6th.

“Mr. Chairman, as you know better than any other Member of this Committee from the wrenching struggle for voting rights in your beloved Mississippi, the problem of politicians whipping up mob violence to destroy fair elections is the oldest domestic enemy of constitutional democracy in America.

“Abraham Lincoln knew it too.

“In 1837, a racist mob in Alton, Illinois broke into the offices of an abolitionist newspaper and killed its editor, Elijah Lovejoy.

“Lincoln wrote a speech in which he said that no ‘transatlantic military giant’ could ever crush us as a nation even with all the fortunes in the world.

“But if downfall ever comes to America, he said, we ourselves would be its ‘author and finisher.’

“If racist mobs are encouraged by politicians to rampage and terrorize, Lincoln said, they will violate the rights of other citizens and quickly destroy the bonds of social trust necessary for democracy to work.


“Mobs and demagogues will put us on a path to political tyranny Lincoln said.



“As we will see today, this very old problem has returned with new ferocity today as a president who lost an election deployed a mob which included dangerous extremists to attack the constitutional system of election and the peaceful transfer of power.

“And as we’ll see, the creation of the Internet and social media has given today’s tyrants tools of propaganda and disinformation that yesterday’s despots could only have dreamed of.

“I yield back to the gentlelady from Florida, Mrs. Murphy.”

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